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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S.-TAIWAN RELATIONS

¶1. Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies focused news coverage December 8-10 on the removal of the old inscription and the debut of the new inscription -- "Liberty Square" -- on the main arch of the Taiwan Democracy Memorial Hall (formerly known as the Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall) over the weekend; on Taiwan's UN referendum; and on the Golden Horse Awards ceremony Saturday. Almost all papers reported on Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Thomas Christensen's talk with the Taiwan media last Thursday, in which he clearly stated U.S. opposition to the DPP's proposed UN referendum. The pro-independence "Liberty Times," however, ran a banner headline on page two that said "Bian Speaks back at the United States: UN Referendum Will Surely Be Passed."

¶2. In terms of editorials and commentaries, the "Free Talks" column in the "Liberty Times" compared Venezuela's referendum and Taiwan's UN referendum and slammed the United States for trampling down on other countries' democratic referenda. A separate "Liberty Times" commentary said the containment of both the United States and China has all the more highlighted the values of the UN referendum. A commentary in the pro-unification "United Daily News," on the other hand, said Washington is "fed up" with the relevant statements given by the Bian administration regarding the UN referendum. The article said Washington is cross-Strait policy is clear; namely it wants both sides of the Taiwan Strait to resume dialogue. An editorial in the pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" commented on Christensen's talk last Thursday and said "Attempts by Washington to escape this reality by pressuring Taiwan voters will only backfire." End summary.

A) "Both Are Referenda"

The "Free Talks" column in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 720,000] wrote (12/8):

"Two countries [i.e. Venezuela and Taiwan] either held or is to hold a referendum, but the U.S. State Department showed different looks and attitudes [toward the referenda]. Is it possible that the United States has a 'double standard' toward democracy and freedom, the 'universal values' that it safeguards wholeheartedly? Or is this simply a 'false image' [of the United States], that it has been hypocritical, while only its vital interests are what really matters? U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Asian and Pacific Affairs Thomas Christensen was 'pointing fingers at' [i.e. criticizing] Taiwan's UN referendum again; he said something like the referendum is 'dangerous, provocative -- remarks that were nearly tantamount to 'threatening' the Taiwan government and its people. Regardless of whether the United States is attempting to interfere with Taiwan's internal affairs, what is more questionable is how could a democratic great power like the United States trample on other countries' democratic referenda like this. ...

"When compared with the 'bad referendum' held by Venezuela, Taiwan's UN referendum is of course a 'good referendum' that is fully consistent with the principles of democracy. Venezuela's 'bad

referendum' generated 'good results,' and Washington said it welcomes such results. But Washington has been using stern remarks to suppress and smother Taiwan's 'good referendum,' as if it wants to beat it down to hell; it is attempting to beat Taiwan's 'good referendum' into bearing 'bad results,' to make it fail to pass. The U.S. approach in reversing good and bad and confusing right and wrong was evidently a move to 'eat the persimmon when it's soft' [i.e. to take advantage of a person when he is weak]. The question is: Is Taiwan a soft persimmon that allows others to squeeze and pinch?"

B) "Containment by both the United States and China Have All the More Highlighted the Value of UN Referendum"

Deputy Editor-in-Chief Tsou Jiing-wen noted in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 720,000] (12/8):

"[U.S. Deputy Secretary of State] Thomas Christensen's talk [last Friday] was definitely not the end. Before the proposed UN bid referendum being held next year, the United States is likely to raise its intensity and keep 'having dialogue' with the Taiwan people. Its purpose is quite simple. In order to be left alone and not to hear Hu Jintao's nagging like an old grandma, it is the best [for Taiwan] to call off the referendum; if the referendum can not be withdrawn, it is the second best that the referendum can not pass the threshold, so that Hu can have a graceful exit from the predicament. ...

"Why is it so? Just take a look at Christensen's talk and it is plain and clear enough. He said that the UN referendum will not help Taiwan's status. Even if the referendum is passed, the United States will not change its one-China policy and Taiwan is still not able to join the UN. While describing the referendum as useless, Christensen was also saying that it is dangerous and provocative and that it may be a referendum on unification or independence. The

rhetoric itself is so contradictory that even Christensen is perhaps hardly aware how to clarify such a useless but dangerous logic. ...

"It is actually not difficult to dig out the real answer behind the mystery; that is, the proposed UN referendum is actually useful. China is afraid of the referendum that can express the public opinion. Once such a democratic mechanism becomes a normal practice, any issue can be put to refer to all the people in Taiwan. In this vein, all the fairy tales made by China, such as Taiwan is part of China and that the 1.3 billion people in China and 23 million people in Taiwan will jointly make decisions, are going to fall apart. The situation is equivalent to the chain reaction set off after Taiwan people elected its president for the first time in 1996. ..."

C) "The United States Is Fed up"

Journalist Sun Yang-ming wrote in the "United Notes" column in the pro-unification "United Daily News" [circulation: 400,000] (12/9):

"The United States' cross-Strait policy has become very clear lately. According to the wording of Washington, the United States has been 'fed up' with the relevant stories or statements made by the Bian administration. Even though AIT Director Stephen Young has been very supportive of Bian, he still said eventually that the United States hopes to see both sides of the Taiwan Strait resume dialogue in May, 2008. Former AIT Chairman Richard Bush even said in public that in the wake of Taiwan's presidential election next year, Washington and Taipei will have approximately one year of 'golden time' to mend the trust between the two sides. Judged from this statement, Washington's future cross-Strait policy is to [push for] 'cross-Strait dialogue,' and further, [to push for] 'cross-Strait talks.' Even though the Bush administration has yet to have completely clear steps for its cross-Strait policy, its direction is unambiguous. ..."

D) "Christensen Shows U.S. Tunnel Vision"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" [circulation: 20,000] editorialized (12/10):

"United States Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Asia-Pacific Affairs Thomas Christensen on Friday issued an apparent ultimatum to President Chen Shui-bian by claiming that the referendum initiated by the Democratic Progressive Party on entering the United Nations using the name of 'Taiwan' was designed to 'unilaterally change the status quo' in the Taiwan Strait. ... Christensen's latest statement formed part of a series of moves by the right-wing Republican Bush administration to downplay the recent tension sparked by Beijing's high-profile refusal to allow the U.S. Kitty Hawk aircraft carrier to stop in Hong Kong and the decision by the White House to ask the carrier to sail to Japan through the Taiwan Strait. Bush may also have decided to intensify pressure on President Chen and his DPP government to ease Beijing's dissatisfaction with Washington over the latter's handling of the Taiwan referendum issue.

"After all, in the wake of the submission of 2.72 million signatures to the Central Election Commission by the DPP-supported Alliance for a Referendum for Taiwan's Entry into the United Nations, there is a good chance that the DPP will be able to energize voters to secure strong turnout, exceeding the threshold of 50 percent of eligible voters and secure passage of the initiative on March 22. In this regard, we are not surprised that American Institute in Taiwan Taipei Office Director Steven Young, Washington's unofficial ambassador, stated last week that the U.S. hopes for better cross-strait relations after the March 22 presidential elections, a comment that implied that Washington has closed the door on the Chen administration.

"The situation is actually quite similar to the external pressures and constraints that existed in our previous three presidential elections, with the notable difference that the threats in the past three polls were verbal threats and military intimidations from an expansionist and authoritarian PRC regime and this time the pressure is from the U.S., the self-styled paragon of democracy. However, just as we opposed People's Republic of China intimidation to block Taiwan's progress toward democracy, we must express our opposition to the claim by Christensen that the U.N. referendum was specially designed to 'unilaterally change the status quo' and his implication that Taiwan should be treated as a kind of pariah state for being too democratic. ...

"We urge U.S. officials to treat both sides of Taiwan Strait on an equal footing. If the holding of a referendum makes Taiwan the party that is 'unilaterally changing the status quo,' we wonder how Washington sees the PRC's increasing deployment of missiles and other offensive forces targeted on Taiwan. As we have previously

noted, Washington seems to have turned a blind eye to Beijing's intensifying diplomatic suppression of Taiwan's international space and even voted in favor of the denigration of Taiwan's status in the Paris-based World Animal Health Organization (OIE). We cannot but wonder whether Christensen truly expects the Taiwan people to ignore these diplomatic humiliations and Beijing's concrete 'unilateral' changes in the status quo in the Taiwan Strait. We must also echo President Chen's timely reminder that Young's expectations will remain wishful thinking if Beijing continues to demand that Taipei must accept its 'one-China principle' before negotiations can resume. Young seems to have forgotten that Beijing persistently ignored a series of 'olive branches' offered by Chen in his first term. ...

"The ball is in Beijing's court and it is highly unlikely that the PRC regime will treat Taiwan's new president with "moderation" or make any adjustments in its 'one-China principle.' These are the most inconvenient truths that the U.S. government and Taiwan's two presidential candidates need to face. Attempts by Washington to escape this reality by pressuring Taiwan voters will only backfire."

YOUNG